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Introduction

Sport has long been viewed as a public ‘good’ – a cultural space for the creation and enactment of the ‘good, healthy citizen’. Yet this public ‘good’ has also been gendered as masculine: competitive, public, hierarchical, and ‘tough’, with women’s participation being historically marginal to men’s. In recent years Australian women’s participation has fluctuated with decline or stagnation in more traditional organized sports (netball, basketball, soccer), and growth in other areas, such as roller derby, Australian football and soccer . However women’s sports are still largely invisible in the popular sport media. In this chapter we focus on roller derby as one particular women’s sport that has undergone a global revival that has been mobilised through ‘new’ media forms that include, on-line social networks, league promotion and fan sites. The reinvention of roller derby is intimately connected to the alternative mediated spaces made possible by the Internet. Roller derby players and organizers have used online spaces for various ends: to promote the sport community, to make visible the relations of power between those involved, to create and maintain boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within the sport, and to express ‘creative’ aspects of identity. This chapter provides examples of the strategies and tactics used to establish and maintain roller derby as a ‘women’s only’ sport and some of the challenges and possibilities inherent in this highly mediated space. Roller derby is an exciting embodied pursuit that allows women the opportunity to push their bodies to their physical limits. But roller derby is more than a ‘sport’; it also creates a gendered leisure space where women play with traditional

notions of passive, heterosexual feminine gender identities and belong to different mediated communities. The popularity of roller derby presents an opportunity to better understand the nexus between creativity and sport which may provide insights into how to counter the persistent gender inequities in women's sport and leisure participation (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006; Hargreaves, 1990; Wearing, 1998).

In this chapter we introduce some of the key challenges for women in sport and identify some of the persistent inequalities within this sphere of social life. In the mainstream media women are marginalized to the extreme. In Australia less than 7% of televised sport is of women's sport (Lumby, Caple, & Greenwood, 2009). This is telling, especially considering the amount of time people spend watching sport on television (Koivula, 1999). We provide some background on the recent growth of roller derby and how it has provided women an alternative to the sports previously available to them. We ask: how have women used the internet and new media communication technologies to promote the sport *and* create a space for the articulation of different sporting identities for women? Roller derby not only pushes women's physical capacities, but also encourages them to be creative and to take control of the organization, rules and governance of sport. The DIY nature of roller derby has been fuelled by the Internet without the hierarchies and restrictions of more traditional sport models. However, despite the possibilities inherent in this form of 'user created' production, there are still tensions in roller derby that challenge the notion that a coherent 'roller derby' exists for all women.

Sport and the media have had a long and complex relationship. Cultural studies have demonstrated the fundamental role the media plays in representing and influencing our beliefs, attitudes and values (see for example Hall, 1977; Turner, 1993). In sport, it could be said that the media plays an even bigger role as it directly influences decision-making processes about how sport is organized, presented, when it is played, who is made visible/invisible and the sort of commentary surrounding the event (Jarvie & Thornton, 2012). Large media conglomerates control most of the sport media and as such have huge investment in the way sport is portrayed. Particularly in regard to gender, the media has been shown to present women in dissimilar and unequal ways to men, undermining their strength, skill and capacity as athletes (see, for example Daddario, 1994; Duncan & Hasbrook, 2002; Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Kane, 1988; Wright & Clarke, 1999). Women are associated with appearance rather than performance (Jarvie & Thornton, 2012, p. 229). While roller derby was invented as a sporting spectacle for television in the 1960s, today it is primarily represented through new communication technologies and a diversity of images and texts on blogs, social network sites and websites. This has meant that to a large extent the sport has so far avoided the 'logic of the media' (Jarvie & Thornton, 2012, p. 230), where content is driven by the economic imperative *and* theatrical and popular appeal to mass audiences.

Roller derby was a popular sport spectacle in the 1960s and 1970s with paid professional skaters, faux violence, television coverage and a tough image. The first incarnation of the game occurred in the late 1920s and since then has been re-invented several times, with its latest re-emergence quickly gaining momentum across the globe (for example Mabe, 2008). In 2001 a group of women in the US reclaimed the

sport, creating a different emphasis, different rules, a flat track and overt connections with third wave feminist groups such as the Riot Grrrl¹ (Pavlidis, 2011; Storms, 2010). The roller derby of the past was played by men and women equally (Mabe, 2008), although women were always paid less (Storms, 2010). The 'new' version was, initially, exclusively played and organised by women with a strong focus on DIY (Do it Yourself) (Beaver, 2012), music subcultures (Pavlidis, 2011) and alternative feminine identities (Finley, 2010). Roller derby refined itself as both a sport and as an empowering space for women to express alternative identities.

Women, sport and roller derby

Woodward could be characterizing the experience of roller derby by stating that '[s]ensations, sensibilities and sensuality are all implicated in sporting embodied practices' (Woodward, 2009, p. 5). Sport is fun, a challenge and provides those who watch and participate with pleasure. Sport provides exhilaration that 'de-materializes the body' and 'overwhelms traditional modes of perception' (Woodward, 2009, p. 133). It makes visible the 'tensions, interrelationships and connections between corporeality and the social world embodied selves inhabit' (Woodward, 2009, p. 5). Sport is also often viewed as the site of 'community' and social capital (Putnam, 1995). The Australian Bureau of Statistics states,

The associational nature of sport and sporting clubs is sometimes seen as a forum for the creation of social capital by providing opportunities and settings for social interaction, sharing, common interests and enhancing a sense of community (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

Around the world sport is celebrated and athletes are revered for their skill and strength.

Yet this public ‘good’ has also been gendered as masculine: competitive, public, hierarchical, and ‘tough’, with women’s participation being historically marginal to men’s. Institutionalized sports confirm patriarchal, techno-capitalist, modernist styles of living (Woodward, 2009, p. 67), often privileging competition, winning and aggression over cooperation, sharing and creativity. Hargreaves writes,

In sport, “masculine” identity incorporates images of activity, strength, aggression and muscularity and it implies, at the same time, an opposite female subjectivity associated with passivity, relative weakness, gentleness and grace. (1986, p. 112 in Theberge, 1987, p. 388)

Historically this has meant that in the main women have been marginalized from sport; where women struggle for fair and equal access, promotion, participation and pay. In sport ‘men usually are active subjects while women fill passive roles, often as wives, sweethearts and admirers’ (Theberge, 1987, p. 388). There have been some exceptions, such as gymnastics and netball which have been deemed ‘appropriate’ for women. Gymnastics (and ice-skating), with a focus on aesthetics and grace, have been traditionally seen as ‘feminine’ and appropriate for women (Trangbæk, 1997). Netball too has been found to promote ideals of ‘compliant femininity’; netball is seen as a ‘girls game’, adhering to social expectations about ‘appropriate female behavior’ (Taylor, 2001, p. 57).

Over time, with the rise of feminism and a greater emphasis on equality between men and women in law, women have begun to enter into the area of sports in greater numbers and in an increasing range of sports. Yet this increase in women’s participation has not automatically generated an equitable environment (see Clasen, 2001). Theberge states,

The feminization of the fitness movement [through the focus on sexual attractiveness and appeal as opposed to physical capacities such as strength and endurance] represents, not the

liberation of women in sport, but their continued oppression through the sexualisation of physical activity (1987, p. 389).

Even where women have entered into traditionally 'male' sports, such as tennis or boxing, women have continued to be sexualized via hyper feminine clothing, make-up and jewelry. For professional women in sport there is often a focus on their private lives in the media and official commentary, undermining their skills and capability as athletes. More recently still we have seen the rise of women's participation in 'alternative' sports, for example surfing, snowboarding, skateboarding and roller derby. These 'alternative' sport practices have been seen as spaces to defy mainstream values and norms, *including* those that marginalize women (see for example Heywood, 2008; Pomerantz, Currie, & Kelly, 2004; Thorpe, 2005). Although most of these 'alternative' sports still privilege the masculine, roller derby has been one sport that positions women at its centre.

Women are coming together around the world to create small, place-based roller derby leagues, with 100s already established in countries from Australia, America, the United Kingdom and several European countries, Canada, Japan and more recently in China and the United Arab Emirates. Each league develops between two to four teams that then play each other. These teams then train together *and* compete against each other, and although the overall goal is to win, there is a real focus on fun, expression and style. As roller derby continues to grow there is pressure on the women involved to model the sport on traditional sport management structures. Despite the women's desire to compete against other teams and their need for funding to support this type of growth, at present they are unwilling to compromise the very things that attracted them to the sport in the first place. They are unwilling to compromise their independence and the freedom to choose the way they use and

display their bodies. However, this desire to protect the sport and the women involved, can limit some of the possibilities made possible in the first place.

The sport of roller derby cannot be reduced to one single sport identity or meaning (competitive or creative expression); rather it is produced through a multiplicity of subjectivities, some of which are synchronistic, with diverse women coming together to not only play the game, but also manage this fast growing, international sport on their own terms. Being less than 10 years old in its current form, the management and organisation of roller derby is influenced by the game itself. In a sport where women risk their bodies and where gender identities are ‘in play’, the stakes—for control, power and meaning making—are high. Roller derby can provide an alternative space for women to use their bodies differently and it allows multiple subject positions to be explored. Yet it is the potential value of this space that makes roller derby so contentious. This emphasis on the value of the sport is implicated in some of the tensions present as the sport continues to grow. Roller derby is a contested space and its emergence as a women’s sport continues to be fought out, on the track, within the very organisations that create them, and, central to this chapter, via virtual spaces on the Internet.

Women who play roller derby present themselves as ‘tough’, ‘strong’ and ‘sexy’. Pain and injury are celebrated via online spaces sometimes called ‘halls of pain’¹ and the ‘femme’ is privileged, with fishnets, tight shorts and make-up being regular parts of league uniforms. In this way roller derby cannot really be described as embodying ‘compliant femininity’, although this idea itself is subject to spatial and

¹ See for example (Rat City Rollers, n.d.)

temporal change. Take the recent proliferation of ‘tough’ women in popular media (Inness, 2004). In some ways this is an extension of the changing image of the ‘ideal’ feminine body. As noted by Sassatelli, the ‘ideal’ body has changed, from

...the cult of slimness of the 1970s and the soft voluptuousness of the 1960s. A new composite ideal of the female body – strong and attractive, muscular and long-limbed, toned and blooming – ultimately contradicts the traditional association of femininity with inactivity and passivity (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 165)

Despite the changed ‘ideal’ feminine body towards a more muscular, strong type, bodies in roller derby still challenge this norm. Bodies in roller derby are not always toned, lean, blooming. Demographic research done by the WFTDA found that their average age of players is around 31 years (2011). This is traditionally the age women start having children in developed countries, yet here women are starting a physically demanding, potentially ‘dangerous’ sport. These ‘older’ women are of different shapes and sizes. These diverse women, of different ages, shapes and sizes, present themselves as ‘tough’, ‘rough’ and ‘sexy’.

In some ways women in roller derby challenges dominant imaginaries of women in sport and society. Women present themselves as strong, rough and sometimes threatening through the use of make-up and costumes as well as their physical prowess on roller skates. Grosz writes,

Misogynist thought has commonly found a convenient self-justification for women’s secondary social positions by containing them within bodies that are represented, even constructed, as frail, imperfect, unruly, and unreliable, subject to various intrusions which are not under conscious control. (Grosz 1994: 13)

Research into women’s participation in sport has shown that when women ‘make the effort to refuse what they have been told they are and to reach towards their potential in the area of body movement’ (Wearing 1998: 110) they often have an increase in

self-confidence, empowerment and liberation from restrictive gender norms. Theberge writes, 'the liberatory possibility of sport lies in the opportunity for women to experience the creativity and energy of their bodily power and to develop this power in the community of women' (Theberge, 1987, p. 393). This inclusion of *creativity* and bodily power is central in roller derby.

The Internet, sport and roller derby

TV is for old school derby. Twitter, RSS, Live Blogging, streaming video are the best way to feel close to the action when you can't afford to make that trip across country for a tournament! ("Western Regionals - almost as good as being there," 2008)

As this quotation attests, roller derby is a sport that has been reinvented in the contemporary era of new digital media forms. This 'digital' context has profoundly shaped its cultural forms of play, spectating and fandom in a global context. Roller derby communities consist of local and globalised networks of players, coaches, referees, officials and fans. The use of digital communication technologies, although by no means unique to roller derby, has opened up a space for creative articulations of the sport and has enabled women the opportunity to promote and grow their sport without relying on public funding or mainstream support. Over the past 10 years there has been a proliferation of websites dedicated to supporting, producing and circulating roller derby identities that are both individual and collective. This visual and textual realm of derby culture also includes a range of cultural artifacts such as clothing and music, as well as a range of sport specific rules and official documents. The roller derby phenomenon is aptly described by Urry in relation to the 'increased

mediatization of social life as images circulate increasingly fast and with added reach so as to form and reform various imagined communities' (2007: 9). Derby has become a sport where the boundary between the 'real' and the 'virtual' is inevitably blurred.

There has been a plethora of research into the everyday cultural meanings, practices and deployment of digital technologies that have accompanied the growth of the Internet. Since the early 1990s researchers working in the areas of sport (MacKay & Dallaire, 2012; Ruddock, Hutchins, & Rowe, 2010; Wilson, 2008), feminism (Driscoll, 1999; Luckman, 1999), media, and subcultures (Gibson, 1999; Hodgkinson, 2003; Kahn & Kellner, 2003, 2004; Williams, 2003) have brought 'virtual' spaces and representations to the fore of their work. Initially a site for 'consumption', the Internet now enables users to produce as well as consume text, ideas, images, sounds, and narratives (Castells, 2003; Manovich, 2009). In particular, research examining riot grrrls (Garrison, 2000) and cybergirls (Driscoll, 1999) highlights how the Internet has been used by women to produce alternative femininities that circulate within a globalised geography.

In the more specific area of sport sociology research has begun to examine how the Internet figures within individual and collective identity formation, and most of this research utilizes a [post]subcultural studies framework (Wilson, 2008). Leonard writes, 'sports studies continues to lag behind in terms of analysis and critical interrogation of new media' (2009, p. 2). This 'lag' is being addressed on several fronts, including examinations of 'traditional' masculine sports (Dart, 2009; Oates, 2009), 'lifestyle'/'subcultural' sports (Wilson, 2008) and, more recently,

(re)presentations of gender and sport online (MacKay & Dallaire, 2012). Women in sport are given dramatically less coverage within mainstream media as compared to men (7% compared to 86%) (Lumby, et al., 2009). For this reason the proliferation and accessibility of blogs, social network sites and user-produced content has been vital for the promotion and celebration of women and sport as well as the opportunity for women to challenge and rewrite gender and sport identities. Niche media, as opposed to mass media (Thorpe, 2008), and zines, such as those produced and circulated by members of the Riot Grrrl scene (Harris, 2003), have also been a site for the production of alternative femininities.

A recent example of the way women are using the Internet in sport is explored in an article by MacKay and Dallaire (2012) who examine a blog produced by the 'Skirtboarders', a female skateboard crew based in Canada. The authors view gender as performative and examine how women (re)present themselves online via images and text. In the 'Skirtboarders' blog MacKay and Dallaire found multiple narratives of femininities being presented, *including* 'stereotypical femininity' (2012, p. 15). Our analysis below also examines the narratives of femininity being presented in relation to roller derby in addition to highlighting the way women in roller derby have used the Internet as a way of adhering to, and challenging, traditional notions of 'sport'.

Our analysis identified four diverse websites: an Australian league's official website (Sun State Roller Girls²), a UK league's official website (London Roller Girls³), an online collaborative blog (Live! Derby! Girls!⁴) originating in the US, and a facebook group (Things I've learnt from derby⁵) with members from all over the

globe. These sites were selected as they evoked some of the ways in which roller derby communities have used virtual spaces to produce and circulate their own ‘version’ of sport – feminine, ‘tough’, and ‘real’. The selection was informed by the first author’s immersion in derby cultures over several years and familiarity with the diversity of virtual spaces. Most importantly, they were all ‘public’ websites that could be accessed by anyone wishing to view their content and without password access. Following the ethical guidelines outlined by the Association of Internet Researchers (Ess & Association of Internet Researchers ethics working group, 2002) we avoided ‘lock and key’ sites where greater privacy is assumed. No attempts were made to deceive participants on the sites, rather, an observational method of ‘lurking’ was taken –reading without taking part in online discussions or making comments of any sort.

Roller derby online – official league sites vs user created content

Derby culture: Sites of empowerment and belonging?

Roller derby league websites commonly articulate the trope of women’s ‘empowerment’ by evoking a collective sense of belonging and the complex pleasure/pain of individual involvement. Yet, the tensions between and among different roller derby leagues highlight the intense affects at play within competitive roller derby communities. There are several ‘versions’ of roller derby currently vying for authority, with each version having slightly different rules and regulations, and, more importantly, a different style⁶. Each version is currently resisting being territorialized, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) might say, by normative sport frameworks, yet risks splintering and exclusion. The virtual identity of roller derby as

a 'singular' sport community is continually undermined through intense conflicts and differences that can be read against each other.

Closely modelled on traditional sports, with a strong emphasis on empowerment and fairness, is the Sunstate Roller Girls' website (an Australian league). In the section titled 'About Sunstate Roller Girls' is the following text:

The Sun State Roller Girls (SSRG) are a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to developing and promoting the sport of women's Flat Track Roller Derby in Brisbane by facilitating the development of athletic ability, sportswomanship and goodwill among league members...We promote the empowerment of women in a safe and organised environment that fosters the health, well-being and personal growth of skaters. We honour diversity and encourage self-expression and are committed to building a network of friendship and support among skaters. We seek continuous improvement in our sport and are committed to democratic principles, constructive dialogue and teamwork.

Similarly, the London Rollergirls' website is also highly professional. It includes information about upcoming events and a very clear cut section on 'what is roller derby'. In the section titled, 'who are the London Rollergirls?' it states:

We are the London Rollergirls: an all-female, skater-owned-and-run roller derby league based in London, England. Formed in April 2006, we were the first roller derby league

established in the UK and are proud to have spearheaded the introduction of this awesome sport to the United Kingdom and Europe. The women that make up the league are not easily defined as there is no prototype for a Rollergirl. You do not need to be tattooed or punk, you do not need to be a sports fanatic but both girls fit in fine and both have a home within the London Rollergirls league. We are comprised of a diverse collection of women of various interests and lifestyles.

The London Rollergirls' mission statement evokes feelings of pride and belonging within a diverse collective that celebrates difference. The website states, 'both [tattooed and highly athletic] girls fit in fine and both have a *home* within the London Rollergirls league'. The deployment of 'home' is appealing; it draws us into an intimate connection with the organisational body of roller derby where there is no 'normal' femininity. The risky pleasures of derby are framed within the safe comforts of a home for all. At the same time the 'official' sites normalize and reterritorialise derby as a cultural space that becomes known and sanctioned in particular ways. Official league sites make visible only the 'empowering' affects (the pleasure of overcoming pain or gendered limits) while the movement of more difficult felt relationships within the sport (frustration, anger or shame) remain unacknowledged. Yet, the unsettling, difficult affects surface within other virtual spaces to disrupt the static official derby narrative of empowerment and belonging.

Virtual boundaries and the derby body politic

The weblog *Live! Derby! Girls!* is one site where different views are circulated. The blog's title banner reads, 'Live derby. Girls, girls, girls', along with

flashing lights reminiscent of strip clubs and motley crew songs. The blog has 20 contributors, all 'derby girls', all literate and articulate, and very creative. The site embraces the 'derby confession' with stories of overcoming adversity, tales of sexual encounters and many entries about not belonging. The most popular blog entry is entitled, 'Overcoming the dark side of roller derby', and the blogger, TrACDC⁷, opens with the following,

I'm about to do something taboo... I am about to admit, right here on the interwebs, that roller derby isn't all camaraderie and fishnets (Live Derby Girls, 2011).

In a very diplomatic tone this blogger confesses that the women in roller derby have not always been supportive. She states,

Who do you think it was that gossiped about the demise of my marriage and said extremely unflattering and unforgiving things about me? A derby...Who made me feel like shit about my lack of derby engagement when my life was falling apart and I was sitting at home with a broken hand? A derby. Who made out with my girlfriend after the after party? You better believe it was a derby. Did these experiences effect how I relate to my team and perform on the track? I want to say they didn't, but they did (Live Derby Girls, 2011).

In response to this blog over 50 comments were posted in the days and weeks following. The responses ranged from impassioned accounts of a destructive 'dark side', shame filled assertions of personal failings, angry claims of exclusion and an out pouring of grief and loss:

I loved derby... I always thought I'd leave with an injury or because I had another path to choose or because I simply stayed long enough. I didn't think I'd leave because I had fallen and shattered into a million pieces. I hope that I can get over it and let it go. Because I don't love derby anymore. And I miss that.

Derby culture is produced through highly ambivalent emotions where love, passion for the sport and commitment to the imagined community, exists alongside the complex feelings of not belonging. By blogging, posting and producing content for websites, the women involved mark out their entitlement to belong in different ways. To speak out against roller derby, or to express negative affects (of 'not love', or hate), is to be positioned as 'other' within the public sphere. This otherness evokes displeasures that are defined against the pleasures of becoming roller derby grrrl that Ahmed (2004c) argues signifies one's 'entitlement' to belong. The virtual space of derby culture is claimed through enjoyment that is 'witnessed' by others (Ahmed, 2004). Those who show the most enjoyment, the most pleasure – those who *love* roller derby the most—are the most entitled. Against the claims of 'happy diversity' within the vision statements of major leagues, exist sites produced by disaffected players who make visible the complex affective economies that are intertwined with the power relations of women's sport.

Extending Probyn's (2005, p. 85) argument about television as a key cultural site where emotion is produced, we view new communication technologies as another more complex interactive and 'felt' space. In particular, facebook is an important contemporary site where individual and collective identities are produced and

negotiated (boyd & Ellison, 2007). 'Things I learned from roller derby' is a public facebook group with over 4,500 fans and is a space where anyone can contribute to an ongoing discussion of roller derby. Daily comments are made on this facebook page and it provides a good example of how social network sites circulate, and in the case of roller derby, intensify affects through stories of pleasure and pain. In this context pride, anger and passion are validated, while sadness and shame are not (Carlson, 2010; Finley, 2010). On both the facebook site (Things I learned from roller derby) and the blog (Live!Derby!Girls!) described earlier, 'Shut up and skate' is a common response given to any expression of 'girly' emotion such as sadness or hurt.

Interactive websites create a collective space where different derby identities are enacted via the rules and gender norms that regulate this 'alternative' sport via the affective power relations that include/exclude. Comments on the blog act as a 'skin', a shifting boundary regulating who is 'in' and who is 'out' of the roller derby body politic; an online participant is 'pounced on' by others for saying something against the status quo. Anyone who expresses too much 'hurt' is 'out'. Women who demonstrate they have a thick skin, who can handle pain (and derive pleasure from pushing and working on the body) are 'in'. A recent comment by the administrators of the group stated: 'there is no entitlement to anything. There is only earning'. Over 80 people 'liked' this post and five women commented, expressing an emotional response to this highly charged issue – enthusiasm, sorrow, and anger. Text and images evoke the subjection of the individual derby body through sport practices that involve pain, pushing oneself beyond gendered limits and intense competition. Moreover, derby websites enable, and also regulate, the flow of meaning for

individuals through the discursive boundaries (or skin) of the collective roller derby 'body politic' (Gatens, 1996).

Discussion and conclusions

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, sport is often conceptualized as a common 'good'; sport is a space where social values around team work, winning, strength and virtue are played out. Women have historically been marginalized from this space, but in the past few decades this trend has slowly been challenged. Yet despite growing opportunities for women to participate in organized sport, their inclusion is often dependant on their willingness to ensure that they still appear 'feminine'. For example, wearing pink as their team colour (Caudwell, 2006) or modeling nude for sports magazines. Roller derby, as a 'new' sport for women has attempted to position itself differently from traditional sports through the use of parody, an emphasis on playfulness and the use of new communication technologies to promote and organize themselves. Through the use of new communication technologies, such as social network sites, blogs and official league sites, women in roller derby have had the 'power' to re-write the norms of sport and femininity.

Through new communication technologies like blogs and social network sites roller derby has very quickly spread across the globe. The Internet has provided a space for women to quickly and easily share information, support each other, and allow multiple voices to be involved in shaping this new international sport. Since 2001 over 900 roller derby leagues have been established (Women's Flat Track Derby Association, 2011) and over 35,000 unique 'derby names' registered with the international register (Two Evils, n.d.). However, using the Internet to grow and

nurture roller derby is not without challenges. The interactive digital interface demonstrates the productive working of power through affective relationships within the virtual space of derby culture. Websites operate through a different register of meaning, one that does not simply 'represent' a women's sport culture, but is as intense as the sport experience itself. Women are 'empowered' to [re]write the sport in varied, sometimes conflicting ways. By writing about, in and through the dark side of derby culture, women's marginalized voices work to 'trouble' the truth claims of empowerment and inclusion of diverse identities on the official league websites.

Yet 'troubling' these truth claims about who and what roller derby is, or is not, and embracing diverse identities in the sport, is not without risk. Earlier we quoted Woodward who wrote that sport 'de-materializes the body' and 'overwhelms traditional modes of perception' (2009, p. 133). Sport provides people with opportunities to use their bodies in pleasurable, exciting ways, yet for women their participation has been restricted and marginalized. Roller derby, and the few examples above of the way the sport has used new media communication technologies, demonstrates the way women have sought to overcome some of the constraints to their leisure participation. To a large degree it is through blogs, social network sites and websites that women in roller derby have been made visible and their sustained participation in the sport has been made possible. Yet it is these same technologies that uncover the 'darkside' of roller derby. It is important to acknowledge the cultural significance of new media technologies in the everyday lives of women in roller derby – not just the growth of roller derby, but also the ways roller derby and the relations of power between those involved are played out in virtual spaces.

Notes

¹The use of 'Grrrl' is a 'feminist reclamation of the word girl with a less polite and more assertive political stance' (Rosenberg & Garofalo, 1998, p. 809)

² <http://sunstaterollergirls.com/>

³ <http://www.londonrollergirls.com/>

⁴ <http://livederbygirls.com/> This was the correct URL when accessed (12 June 2011) however the website has been taken over by a commercial enterprise completely unrelated to roller derby. This very much speaks to the fleeting and fluid movements of online content and the way meanings can very quickly change. Traces of the blog and its derby content can be found on other blogs and Internet sites, for

example: <http://fivepointgrandslam.blogspot.com.au/2011/07/overcoming-dark-side-of-roller-derby.html> and <http://www.theroadtorollergirl.com/2011/02/16/reply-turned-post-derby-aint-a-bed-of-feminist-roses/>

⁵ <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Things-I-learned-from-Derby/349318613615>

⁶ Two of the main leagues that are vying for authority within the roller derby community are the Women's Flat Track Derby Association <http://wftda.com/> and Modern Athletic Derby Endeavour <http://www.skatemade.org/>. These leagues have slightly different rules, and different values and ways of organising competition.

⁷ Women in roller derby take on a 'derby name' or moniker for themselves. A list of registered names around the world can be found on the international list, <http://www.twoevils.org/rollergirls/>

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